

BRITISH KING LUCIUS, THE GRAIL, AND JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA:
THE QUESTION OF BYZANTINE ORIGINS

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The relationship between the Grail legend in Western Europe and traffic to and from the Byzantine East is a topic of great interest to, but little researched by, many students of Arthuriana. In an earlier article (Scavone, "Joseph of Arimathea") I briefly proffered the argument that the fictitious second-century British King Lucius was actually the historical King Lucius Abgar VIII (177-212) of Edessa (modern Urfa, Turkey), referred to in Latin as "Britium" by a redactor of Clement of Alexandria as early as 200 CE. The present study expands upon the evidence for the hypothesis of a consequent confusion of Britium and Britain. Intimately connected to the identification of Lucius are the questions of the literary origins of the Grail and the literary sources of Joseph's role in the Grail saga.

By way of further background for establishing the Edessa linkage to the Grail and to fortify the identification of Lucius Abgar as a corrective in British church history, the above-mentioned article also introduced into Grail discussions the Byzantine *melismos* ("fraction") Eucharistic liturgy, a ceremony that would have been witnessed by the knights of the Fourth Crusade both on the altar and in murals of Byzantine churches¹ as they attended Mass in Constantinople during their eighteen-month sojourn there before fighting broke out in 1204. In this ritual, a cloth with the image of the infant's body seems to have been placed over the loaf of leavened bread, and the celebrant cut through the cloth with a scalpel called a *lonche* or "lance," piercing the figure of the infant in the side as he cut the bread into the communion morsels (Figures 1 and 2). The infant Jesus thus *liturgically* changes into the adult Jesus who is the actual sacrificial victim of Good Friday and who distributed his body to the disciples at the Last Supper.² Students of the Grail will recognize in this "polymorphic Jesus" of the *melismos* an intimation of the similar transformations of the Christ Child to the Crucified Christ as described in Galahad's Grail vision in the *Vulgate Queste*, in Gawain's Grail vision in the *Perlesvaus*, and in Arthur's Mass vision also in the *Perlesvaus*. *Melismos* will also be recognized by Arthurians in the fairly repulsive scene in the *Vulgate Estoire* in which God commands Josephes to break apart the child in his hands in three pieces and eat the parts: *desmenbrer chou que tu tiens en iii*

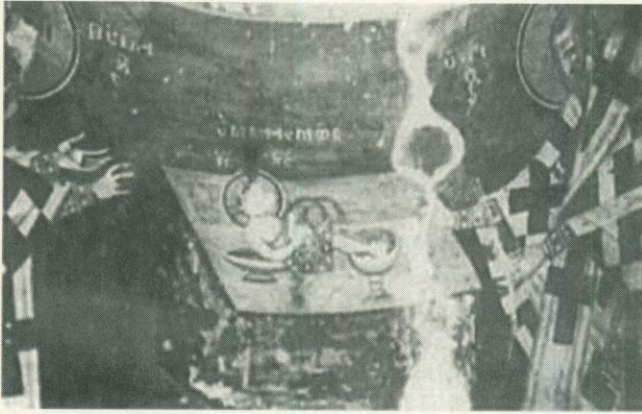


Figure 1: Melismos scene from Donja Kamenica (Bulgaria) dated 1200.



Figure 2: Melismos scene from King Milutin's Church at Studenica (Serbia) dated 1190.

Two mural examples of the Byzantine *melismos* ("fraction") liturgy. Reprinted from Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London: Variorum, 1982), Plates 55 and 56.

pieces . . . rechoif.³ The Child changing to the Crucified Christ thus lies at the heart and essence of the achievement of the Grail, and it appeared in Western Grail romances precisely at the time of the returning Crusaders.

The vivid *melismos* mural art seems to have been inspired by the presence of the famous Edessa icon, a life-sized figure of Jesus after the deposition that lay at the center of the eighth-century iconoclasm debates. The earliest *melismos* mural art coincides in time with the presence of the icon in Constantinople, where it certainly also inspired the new artistic motif of the *threnos* ("lamentation scene") depicting Jesus lying in state. This scene could be found in church murals and on the *epitaphioi*, embroidered liturgical cloths used in every Greek church. The Easter display of the Edessa icon both there and, after 944, in Constantinople involved a gradual raising of the cloth throughout the day, revealing—we are not told how—Jesus, first as an infant and then, in stages, as a boy, a young man, and lastly as the crucified victim. Such display in Edessa already before 944 seems to have presaged the underlying theme of the *melismos* of the eleventh-century Byzantine liturgy and the other new artistic themes already mentioned. Already in 958, long before the Fourth Crusade, this icon was thought to be the real burial shroud provided by Joseph of Arimathea in the New Testament.⁴

By way, therefore, of the confusion of Britium and Britain, certain religious texts and practices of Byzantine Edessa can be seen to have been transferred via Constantinople to the West. The tradition in Britium/Edessa of Joseph's New Testament shroud, a cloth whose ritual display resonated the polymorphic Jesus that is an essential element of the achievement of the Grail by the best knight, will go far towards explaining Joseph's prominence in Grail histories that began in the West at the very moment when traffic to and from the Byzantine East was at new heights.⁵ Because of the inevitable confusion spawned by the early reference to Edessa as Britium, Venerable Bede had been easily tempted to interpret texts describing the arrival of Christianity in Edessa/Britium as referring to Britain, establishing a precedent for the entire body of interconnections that followed. The story of this literary misunderstanding, one that seems to have no oral tradition, no folklore, as its impetus, is the major theme of this study.

British King Lucius

The name of King Lucius appears in the writings of early and late medieval chroniclers of British history from Bede (c. 700) through Pseudo-Nennius (c. 830) to William of Malmesbury (c. 1125), Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1136), William's redactors in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and even John Hardyng in the fifteenth century. All of these

accounts, each clearly borrowing from and embellishing the earlier ones, agree that this Lucius wrote a letter to Pope Eleutherus (Eleutherius) asking for missionaries to come and convert his people. It is important to note that Gildas (sixth century), the earliest British source we have about Britain in the period following the departure of the Romans, does not mention a King Lucius.⁶ Somewhere, therefore, between Gildas and Bede must be sought a source intruding this "King" Lucius into a Britain that was still in the third century the Roman province of Britannia. Bede's interpretation of an entry in a copy of the *Liber Pontificalis* has already been suspected by some scholars as the source of this error, and I believe here to have confirmed this hypothesis. Its confirmation, in turn, has helped establish the fact that British King Lucius was actually King Lucius Abgar of Edessa (Britium). As already noted, an Edessan King Lucius reinforces a linkage between the texts about the Edessan icon and the Western legends of the Holy Grail, set in Arthur's Britain and providing the setting for many an Arthurian tale.

I have emphasized that my quest is for the *literary* origins of the Grail and the *literary* sources for Joseph's role. Perhaps the point should be made once, at least, that the Holy Grail was born in a literature of fiction, so its legends need not refer to any existing cup or dish. They comprise a story cycle in which writers were free to exercise their creativity in altering details at will. It is also true that there need not ever have been a real Perceval, Gawain, or even Arthur. The icon, on the other hand, had a real existence. Texts in Latin retelling Edessan legends and describing the rituals surrounding the famous icon had reached the West already by the eighth century. Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate, members of the supporting cast of the Gospels, became prominent characters in the post-canonical New Testament apocrypha that also began in the Greek East. These apocryphal accounts gave Robert de Boron the idea and, often, the very words for his creation of a pseudo-historical pedigree for Chrétien's Grail. After Robert, writers continued to alter certain details and add new ones as their spirits moved them. In every case, Edessa's strange ritual provided the polymorphic Jesus imagery, detailed differently in several mainstream Grail narratives, just as it had inspired elements of Greek Orthodox liturgy and art.

Recent and Current Scholarship about Lucius of Britain

Arthurian scholars have had differing opinions as to the identity of Bede's Lucius. Some accept him for Britain.⁷ Kenneth Jackson was, perhaps, the first to uncover another historical Lucius. As may be guessed from his subject's full name, Lucius Artorius Castus, Jackson was then on the trail of an original for the name and person of King Arthur himself.

According to Jackson, this Lucius was “apparently a Dalmatian, who led the VIth Legion on an expedition to Armorica in the middle of the second century.” Rachel Bromwich et al. note the source of this Lucius in his epitaph, which indicates that, as *praefectus castrorum* of the VIth Legion stationed at York, he was sent as *dux* to lead Rome’s forces from Britain against the Armoricans. These scholars know that the second or third century is too early for Arthur but surmise that Artorius may have left descendants in Britain.⁸ Building on these beginnings, C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor have recently brought Castus into prominence again to explain the origin of King Arthur.⁹ In one of the most enthusiastic Arthurnet exchanges in recent years (between approximately March 1999 and December 2000), William Cloud Hicklin and Linda Malcor debated the merits of Malcor’s hypothesis recreating Lucius Artorius Castus in a role as perhaps the most important Roman in Britain in the late second century. For Malcor, this would establish his name as the patronymic model for King Arthur. Richard Barber, on the other hand, has asserted that any connection between Lucius Artorius Castus and King Arthur cannot seriously be defended. In this he has more recently been seconded by Frank Reno.¹⁰

While the debate about the true identity or historicity of King Arthur is outside the topic of this study, it serves as a preface to the matter at hand. For Malcor, not only is Lucius Castus the original Arthur, but he is also the original for King Lucius of Britain. The Hicklin-Malcor debate (see above and note 9 below) sometimes focused on Malcor’s position that Castus is the Lucius referred to in the *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*) and that the epistle to a pope in Rome was misunderstood by a redactor of the *LP*. For Malcor, the “epistle” was really a “delegation,” and it was political and not religious. Hicklin (more nearly agreeing with the position argued in the present study) stated that there must have been two separate and unrelated events. On the one hand was a troop (“delegation”) of 1500 javelin men sent by “the lieutenants in Britain” to warn Commodus of Perennis’ plot (Dio, LXXIII.9.3)—as Malcor has argued. It is bothersome that there is no Lucius or Castus in Dio’s account and that Herodian (I.9.1-8 in Whittaker, Vol. 1, 52-59) makes the warning come from a local actor rather than a delegation from Britain. The other event was a documented, if not certainly historical, letter (Eusebius, *HE* I.13) from a real King Lucius Abgar VIII of Edessa to Pope Eleutherus, as announced by the *LP* and so understood and accepted by Bede, Pseudo-Nennius, William of Malmesbury, and Geoffrey. Abgar VIII’s names are found on his coins (see Babelon), on some of which Stauffer, cited by Wilson (1998, 168-72), has noticed the appearance of a (Christian?) cross on the headdress of Abgar. Malcor is right that there are no mass conversions in Britain in the

170s or 180s. Hence, she interprets the account in the *LP* as a political event belonging to British pseudo-history. But in opposition to that view is the extensive primary literature, largely outside the purview of Arthuriana (notes 18-21, *passim*), which has long known that the Lucius in question was not in Britain. We must conclude that any missionaries sent by Pope Eleutherus would have gone to Britium/Edessa and, in fact, that mass conversions did occur historically in Edessa under Abgar VIII, who himself became a Christian in the time of Eleutherus. In brief, suffice it to say that by the evidence presented here, Castus may not be sustained as the original of Bede's *Lucius britannus rex*.

In contrast, R. G. Collingwood and other historians—whether of early Britain, of Arthuriana, of primitive Christianity, or of Byzantium—have had some success in unraveling the tradition that a British King Lucius introduced Christianity into his lands in the second century. And a few have found him out in Edessa. The level of uncertainty among established scholars of Arthurian England has opened the way to the present interpretation, one with largely unanticipated ramifications. The words of R. G. Collingwood on the origins of the Christian faith in Britain may be applied to the nature of many legends and are germane:

How Christianity first came to Britain we do not know. . . . A story grew up, based on a confusion between the name of Britain and that of Britium in Mesopotamia, that in the year 167 king Lucius sent to the pope for missionaries. . . . Later it was said that the first seeds of the faith had been brought by . . . Joseph of Arimathea. . . . Taken literally, these stories are pious inventions. But they were invented in order to explain a fact: the fact that Christianity did reach Britain at an early date.¹¹

I must agree with Collingwood about the apocryphal nature of such tales—as applied to Britain. On the other hand, King Lucius of *Britium* was a historical person who did engage in efforts to establish the faith in *his* country in the second century. The path from here on is tortuous but will, I hope, be rewarding—and convincing—to those who persevere with me. The connectors point always to Edessa/Britium and to its second-century king, Lucius Abgar VIII.

Venerable Bede

Bede is the earliest known historian to mention a British King Lucius. This Lucius was thus invented quite late, about 700. Bede's remarks about Lucius (*H. E.* 1.4) hold great weight, since he was read by practically every subsequent medieval British writer:

Anno ab incarnatione Domini CLXVI, M. Antoninus Verus, decimus quartus ab Augusto, regnum cum Aur. Commodo fratre decimus quartus ab Augusto, regnum cum Aur. Commodo fratre suscepit; quorum temporibus cum Eleutherus vir sanctus Romanae ecclesiae praeesset, misit ad eum Lucius, Britanniarum rex, epistolam, obsecrans ut per eius mandatum christianus efficeretur; et mox effectum piae postulationis consecutus est; susceptamque fidem Britanni usque in tempora Diocletiani principis inviolatam integramque quietam in pace servabant.

In 166 (CLXVI), M. Antoninus Verus [=Marcus Aurelius], 14th from Augustus, began to rule with his brother Aur. Commodus [=L. Verus]; during their reign, Lucius, king of the Britons, sent a letter to Eleutherus, the head of the Roman church, asking that he might be made a Christian through his agency. This was soon effected and the Britons observed their new faith inviolate and whole, quietly in peace, until the rule of Diocletian.

Bede has placed the letter of Lucius during the shared reign of the brothers Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, whose years together in power cover 161 to 169, when Verus died. But Marcus Aurelius shared his throne a second time, in 177-80, with his son Commodus. As will become clear, it is this second pairing of father and son that better fits the scenario of a duumvirate in Rome concurrent with Pope Eleutherus (who reigned fifteen years, variously dated between 167 and 195) and King Lucius Abgar of Britium/Edessa (177-212). It is not surprising that, having reached the wrong conclusion, Bede himself added the erroneous chronology and the word *fratre*. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that both the brother and the son included the names L. Aurelius Commodus in their nomenclature, facilitating the confusion.¹²

The *Historia Brittonum* (HB)

Pseudo-Nennius certainly drew from Bede, adding some original insights, confusing some details, and showing some degree of carelessness about historical information in his efforts to abridge. The most commonly quoted version of par. 22 of the *HB* reads:

Anno Domini CLXIV Lucius, Britannicus rex, cum universis regulis totius Britanniae baptismum susceperunt, missa

legatione ab imperatoribus Romanorum et a papa Romano Evaristo.

In 164 CE British King Lucius, with the chieftains of all Britain, accepted baptism, a delegation having been sent from the emperors of Rome and the Roman Pope Evaristus.

In this version, Pseudo-Nennius has wrongly named Pope Evaristus in the context of the year 164, and he has alleged a collaboration of pagan emperors and popes 150 years before Constantine. John Morris, editor of the *HB*, wrote in 1977 that from its thirty-five extant Latin manuscripts, “any attempt to reconstruct Nennius’ original text is subjective.” However, the manuscript preferred by Morris may yield some clarity:

CLXVII annos post adventum Christi Lucius, Brittannicus rex cum omnibus regulis totius Brittannicae gentis, baptismum suscepit, missa legatione ab imperatoribus Romanorum et a papa Romano Eucharisto.

Morris translates (23):

Lucius, the British king, received baptism, with all the underkings of the British nation, 167 years after the coming of Christ, after a legation had been sent by the Roman emperors and by Eucharistus, the Roman Pope.

There never having been a Pope Eucharistus, I would alter the last words of this translation to read, “. . . after a legation had been sent by the Roman emperors and the Eucharist sent by the Roman pope.” The year of the conversion in the two versions of the *HB* above (CLXIV and CLXVII) may be explained as simple misreadings of Bede’s CLXVI. Despite the different names applied to the pope in question, we are able to recognize Pseudo-Nennius’ adaptation of Bede’s account. But Evaristus (pope from c. 97 to c. 105) is too early and Pope Eucharistus is nonexistent. The juxtaposition in both versions of the words *papa Romano* and the names *Evaristo* and *Eucharisto*, respectively, opens the door to the translation I have suggested, by which the term “Eucharisto” in this second version was not intended as the name of a pope but carried an entirely different sense, one found in the expression used by Eusebius (*H.E.* V.24.9): “The presbyters . . . used to send the Eucharist to Christians from [various] dioceses.”

It is impossible to reconstruct the sequence of the different versions of the *HB*. But this seems clearly to have been the sense intended by the copyist who preferred the term Eucharistus to Evaristus. There seems to be no source that Pseudo-Nennius might have used for his Lucius other than Bede, so where Bede has “Eleutherus,” we should expect to find his name in the *HB*. But the copyists of the *HB*, one after the other, seem never to have gotten the year or the name of the pope right. Rather, we must suppose, one copyist, who knew that Evaristus could not have been Bede’s pope in the 160s but who read *papa Romano Evaristo* in the MS of the *HB* that he was copying, changed the name of the pope from “Evaristus” to “Eucharistus.” The path from one name to the other is easy to discern. Since the pope in question was a Greek and his name was really Euaristos, the alteration to Eucharistus required adding only a “ch” (chi)—essentially a single letter—but did not require altering the order of the words. In doing so, Pseudo-Nennius changed the sense of the text and had a pope—now *unnamed*—send the Eucharist to Britain as a sign of acceptance by the Church. I am not insisting on literal historical truth here—the role of the emperors in Britain’s Christianization cannot be factual—but I am urging the above as the only possible “paper trail” for the Lucius reference leading from Bede.¹³

Geoffrey of Monmouth

Bede and Pseudo-Nennius were certainly Geoffrey of Monmouth’s sources for his Lucius. Ashe’s discussion (see my note 7) deals only with Lucius Hiberus. In Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*HRB*), Lucius Hiberus (“the Spaniard”) has a number of allies drawn from the Near East. This emperor was Arthur’s antagonist in his great but nonexistent Gallic war against imperial Rome. There being no historical Lucius Hiberus of Rome, Geoffrey seems to have known only that there was a rather significant Emperor Lucius who had had a role in early British history and that he also operated at some distance from Britain. It seems certain, then, that Geoffrey’s fertile mind invented an Emperor Lucius Hiberus even as he reinvented King Arthur out of Pseudo-Nennius’ Arthur the warlord (*dux bellorum*). It seems quite possible that Geoffrey had in mind Emperor Lucius (Septimius) Severus, who campaigned in the East, had remarkable dealings with Lucius Abgar of Edessa and with other oriental rulers, and also campaigned in Britain. Hiberus parallels Severus at many points. But Geoffrey knows also the Lucius who was supposed to have brought Christianity to the Britons. In his *HRB*, this other Lucius was a king of Britain, son of Coillus:

[He] . . . despatched his letters to Pope Eleutherius [*sic*] beseeching that from him he might receive Christianity. For the miracles that were wrought by the young recruits of Christ's army in divers lands had lifted all clouds from his mind, and panting with love of the true faith, his pious petition was allowed to take effect, forasmuch as the blessed Pontiff, finding that his devotion was such, sent unto him two most religious doctors, Faganus and Duvianus, who, preaching unto him the Incarnation of the Word of God, did wash him in holy baptism and converted him unto Christ. . . . [Lucius] departed this life, and was buried with honor in the church of the first See in the year 156 from the Incarnation of Our Lord. No issue left he to succeed him, whence at his death dissension arose amongst the Britons and the power of the Romans was weakened. . . . When these tidings were brought to Rome, the Senate sent as legate [Lucius Septimius] Severus the senator with two legions to recover the country to the Roman power. So soon as he had landed, he did battle with the Britons.¹⁴

In this passage on the Christianization of Britain under "King Lucius" via the agency of Pope Eleutherus, clearly drawn from Bede and the *HB*, we have yet another opportunity to observe Geoffrey's methods of creative amplification of the information he received, for we know his sources and what little they delivered.

The *Liber Pontificalis*: The Source of Much Confusion

While the dates of the reigns of pope and emperors, as also of the letter, have been garbled in these accounts, the event itself is clearly the same in all. Fortunately, it is possible to trace the Ur-source of the confusion which produced a King Lucius anachronistically in Roman Britain. The paper trail that emanates forward from Bede also leads backward from Bede to a precise origin. An anonymous sixth-century copyist or redactor seems to be the unwitting culprit. The work he was transcribing, about 530, was the *Liber Pontificalis* (hereafter *LP*), a chronicle of the popes listing salient events during each reign. While it included the number of years, months, and days of a pope's reign, it gave no actual years. This had to be calculated by Bede. The papal list which was the source used by this sixth-century copyist was the *Chronographus anni 354*, better known as the *Liberian Catalogue*, so called because it was originally compiled under Pope Liberius (352-66). Under the reign of Pope Eleutherus (variously dated as early as 167-82 in Bede or 177-92 in Eusebius, *H.E.*, V.1.1, and as late as 180-95), the copyist inserted into the

LP the following statement (not in the *Liberian Catalogue*): *Hic [Eleutherus] accepit epistulam a Lucio Brittannio [sic] rege ut christianus efficeretur per eius mandatum. . . .* ([Eleutherus] “received a letter from British King Lucius asking that he might be made a Christian through his agency.”) The entry adds, “He was bishop at the time of Antoninus and Commodus until the year when Paternus and Bradua were consuls” (*usque consulibus Paterno et Bradua*). No such letter has ever been found. But in forging the path that led through Bede to William of Malmesbury, this insertion has had the most extraordinary and enduring consequence, including an obviously spurious reply from the pope—spurious because it was addressed to the nonexistent King Lucius of Britain (see note 15 below).

Since the identification of little-known consuls would not necessarily have triggered any dates for Bede, he chose to stand by his chosen—though erroneous—imperial duumvirate and to insert both a date known to fall in their years and also the epithet *fratre* for Lucius Verus. However, the consuls named above confirm that Bede chose wrongly and that the duumvirate of emperors was actually Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. Paternus Tarruntinus was a jurist and praetorian prefect put to death for treason by Commodus around 185, and as Dio puts it (LXXIII.5.1), at his death he “was enrolled among the ex-consuls.” The reference to Paternus and Bradua vindicates the credibility of the *LP*, at least in this instance. Paternus and Bradua were consuls in 185, and this would be near enough to any of the given and possible years of Eleutherus’ death. But there is yet more evidence for this conclusion. In the *Liberian Catalogue*, the source used by the anonymous redactor of 530, can be read that Eleutherus was pope *a cons. Veri et Hereniani usque Paterno et Bradua*. Verus and Herenianus were consuls in 171.¹⁵ Together the two pairs of consuls set the years of Eleutherus’ papacy: 171-85, thus also establishing the years within which British King Lucius must be placed. Moreover, they work well with the known years of the reign of Lucius Abgar VIII, 177-212. Finally, Abgar’s regnal years encompass the military activity of Lucius Septimius Severus (emperor 193-211). This last will prove later to be important.

Since Gildas was not Bede’s source,¹⁶ Bede was almost certainly using the anonymous redaction of the *LP* for his account of King Lucius. Any residual hesitation about this must be dispelled when we know that Bede had a “research assistant” in Rome, Nothelm, whom Bede names in his Preface (Sherley-Price 42):

My principal authority and advisor in this work has been . . .
Abbott Albinus, an eminent scholar, educated . . . at Canterbury

by Archbishop Theodore [of Tarsus]. . . . He carefully transmitted to me in writing or verbally through Nothelm, a priest in the church of London, anything he considered worthy of mention. . . . Nothelm himself later visited Rome and obtained from the present Pope Gregory (II) permission to examine the archives of the holy Roman Church.¹⁷

As I have mentioned, Collingwood and a few others have found no King Lucius, since there would not have been a British King Lucius in second-century Britannia. I will urge again, but with the enhanced support apparatus given above, that this Lucius, whose conversion was inserted into the *LP*, does not belong in England but in Edessa.

The task remaining is yet more demanding: to discover the source of the Eleutherus passage in the *LP*. The source must account for the copyist's blatant error of imputing a King Lucius in provincial Britannia in the late second century. When that shall have been achieved and when we shall have confirmed King Lucius Abgar VIII of Edessa as the Lucius of the *LP*, the by-product may well provide an answer to the oft-asked question "Why Joseph of Arimathea?" as the first caretaker of the Holy Grail. We may also hope to uncover some insights into the question of the textual origins of the Grail.

King Lucius of Britium/Edessa

Already in 1904 Adolf Harnack had said that the only King Lucius who was converted to Christianity in the late second century was King Lucius Abgarus, contemporary of Pope Eleutherus and first Christian king of ancient Edessa. Harnack also discovered that the Syriac word for the citadel of Edessa was the *Birtha* or *Birta*, first rendered in Latin by a translator of the lost *Hypotyposes* of Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) as *Britium*. Harnack noticed that the adjective *Britannio* in the *LP* is an unusual form that ought to be *Britannico* if Britain were clearly intended.¹⁸ When Bede (or Nothelm) read *Lucio Britannio rege*, he naturally thought it was a reference to the conversion of Britain.

Harnack's interpretation is well supported by documented events. His insight is, to my knowledge, undisputed among scholars of early Christianity. In 194-95 Abgar VIII joined a pro-Parthian uprising in Mesopotamia. Lucius Septimius Severus defeated the coalition against Rome and appointed a procurator for Osroene, of which Edessa was the chief city. Apparently, when Abgar identified himself with the Roman cause by sending his sons as hostages to Rome, Severus gave the throne back to Abgar, who then helped him defeat the invading Parthians in 197. Sometime afterwards, Abgar paid a triumphant state visit to Rome.¹⁹

Harnack had said that in taking the name Lucius Aelius Septimius Megas Abgarus, Abgar VIII was honoring both the emperors Lucius Aelius Commodus (180-92), infamous son of Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Septimius Severus (193-211). This seems plausible enough, but in fact, Abgar had a personal connection only with Septimius (see also note 7).²⁰ The first branch of the Vulgate, the *Estoire* or *Grand St. Graal*, supports this view. There we may again read the story of our King Luce [*sic*] of Britain who was converted to Christianity by Petrus (Peter) and whose grandson was named Carcelois. Pursuing the task of identifying that Lucius whom Abgar wished to honor by adopting his names, it seems that the writer of the *Estoire* or his source had Lucius Septimius Severus in mind, since that emperor's son was Caracalla (ruled 211-17). Thus we have a close and hardly accidental similarity of names, Luce and Carcelois on the one hand and Lucius and Caracalla on the other. As for Petrus, the *Estoire* follows Robert de Boron, who had sent him to the West, to Avaron, as the point man for the larger group of Christians. Paul Imbs (71) has said that the three most frequent features of apocryphal literature are transposition, amplification, and contamination. Here we may detect something of each of these manipulations.²¹

Eusebius (*H.E.*, V.3.4 and 23.4) reports that the church leaders in Phrygia and Osrhoene communicated with Roman Pope Eleutherus and his successor. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of these lines of Eusebius. So Abgar VIII of Osrhoene, who Dio says paid a state visit to Rome, could have discussed in Rome his contemplated conversion and corresponded with the pope concerning having Roman missionaries in his region. Still nobody knows with certainty the source for the statement that Pope Eleutherus received a letter from *Lucio Britannio rege*.

Why Eleutherus? The Legend of Abgar and the Holy Face

Our Lucius Abgar VIII belongs in the late second century. The earliest version of the conversion story is found in Eusebius (*H.E.*, I.13). However, the protagonist in this text is, by now surprisingly, not Abgar VIII, but his forefather Abgar V Ukama (ruled 17-50 CE). This Abgar V was ailing and sent a delegation of three men with a letter to Jesus, whose reputation as a healer had reached him in Edessa. Jesus replied by an autograph letter that he would send a disciple to heal Abgar. After Jesus' Ascension, Judas Thomas sent Jude Thaddaeus, who healed Abgar and brought Christianity to the masses in Edessa by his preaching and miracles. Eusebius says he found the correspondence between Jesus and Abgar V in the archives of Edessa. These were written in Syriac, the dialect of Aramaic used in Edessa. The Edessan conversion account was therefore already in place in 325 when Eusebius wrote. The problem is

that the letter exists only in Eusebius' book, and it must be remembered that the whole story of a first-century conversion of Edessa may be only a legend in the first place.²²

The next earliest extant version of the story, the apocryphal Syriac *Doctrine of Addai (DOA)*, has been dated in the late fourth century. Here Abgar V sent Hanan and two others on a mission to Sabinus, Roman governor of Syria. They found him in Eleutheropolis—literally the “city of Eleutherus.”²³ Passing by Jerusalem, Hanan saw Jesus preaching and healing the sick and also became aware of the plots of his enemies. He reported everything to Abgar. Then Abgar sent Hanan back with a letter to fetch Jesus or, if not, to bring back a likeness. Hanan made a portrait of Jesus from life in Jerusalem—soon to be described as the Holy Face of Edessa. Unlike the version of Eusebius, Jesus sent no letter but only an oral promise that he would soon send a disciple, and he added that Edessa would never be conquered. These legendary elements suggest the unknown source used by the redactor of the *LP*, who, out of confusion or carelessness, made a (to him mysterious) King Lucius write a letter to Pope Eleutherus in Rome (cf. Eleutheropolis), which itself, in a manner of speaking, was the city of Eleutherus. The outcome is the same in Edessan fact and in British pseudo-history—that is, the conversion of the king's land to Christianity.²⁴

A most important modification—not the last—of the Abgar legend is found in the *Acts of Thaddaeus* (in Greek, sixth century). In this version Abgar's agent Hanan, now named Ananias, could not achieve his portrait, so Jesus wiped his face on a *sinclon tetradiplon* (a burial cloth folded in eight layers) and miraculously imprinted the image of his face upon it. From this time on, the Holy Face of Edessa was known as *acheiropoietos*, or “not made by (human) hands.” A cloth folded in eight having the image of a full-sized face on the exposed portion must be larger than a small towel and opens the possibility, later confirmed, that the image on this once-existing cloth icon was of Jesus' entire body.²⁵

On Edessa as Britium

Elsewhere I have laid out evidence that the first-century conversion account, described above, may actually have been set in motion sometime between 177 and 212 by Lucius Abgar VIII, Edessa's first certainly Christian king.²⁶ He did so in order to give the Edessan Church an apostolic origin. Abgar VIII had a political motive as well: that this story should record the promise of Jesus, made to his own ancestor Abgar V, that Edessa's defense system was in good hands. Edessa's archives mention a Christian church in Edessa in 201, and an entry under 205 tells that Abgar VIII built the Birta (citadel castle) in that year. It is in this latter

entry that one may find the beginning of the confusion of Edessa (or Britium) and Britain. Theodor Zahn (Vol. 3, 70) noted a Latin translation of the *Hypotyposes* of Clement of Alexandria (fl. c. 200) listing apostles' burial places. In it we read:

Petrus et Paulus Romae sepulti sunt; Andreas Patrae civitate Acaiae; Jacobus Zebedaei in arce Marmarica; Johannes in Epheso; Philippus cum filiabis suis in Hierapoli Asiae; . . . Thaddaeus et Judas [Thomas] in Britio Edessenorum. . . . Clemens in quinto libro hypotyposeon id est informationum.

(Peter and Paul were buried in Rome; Andrew in *Patrae civitate Acaiae*; James the son of Zebedee in *Arce Marmarica*; John in Ephesus; Philip with his daughters in Asian Hierapolis; . . . *Thaddaeus and Judas . . . in Britium of the Edessenes*. . . . [emphasis added]. [Thus said] Clement in the 5th book of his *Hypotyposes*, that is, his *Outlines*.)²⁷

Why Joseph? I. The Burial-Shroud Icon of Edessa

Ian Wilson was the first to associate Joseph's New Testament shroud with the literature dealing with the Holy Face icon of Edessa.²⁸ Since, as the Acts of Thaddaeus hints and other versions (below) state, the Holy Face of Edessa was really a larger burial-cloth icon (*sindon tetradiplon*), then it relates directly to Joseph. In short, by this thesis, Jesus' NT shroud—which would have contained both body and blood, the one object for which Joseph of Arimathea is best known—is associated legendarily, and perhaps historically, with Edessa/Birta/Britium. Joseph's association with the original shroud icon of Britium/Edessa provides a major nexus in answering the question of why Joseph would be identified as "apostle" to Britain and first keeper of the Grail. This theme, too, has found support in another NT apocryphon and in a critical confusion that clearly relates to it.

Why Joseph? II. The Georgian "I, Joseph"

The apocryphon in question is a Georgian text of the eighth century, possibly from a fifth-century model. The account recited in par. 10 of several manuscripts closely resembles both the *Gospel of Nicodemus/Acts of Pilate* (where Joseph of Arimathea is a major figure) and the canonical Gospels. The text contains two salient points. The first is that it joins St. Peter, St. Philip, and Joseph in the construction of a church in honor of the Virgin in Lydda, almost due west of Jerusalem. In the NT, the milieu of anyone named Philip is in the Middle East. If Joseph as missionary was originally attached to Philip, and if no Philip preached Christianity in the

West (i.e., in France—see below), then neither was Joseph in the West. The question emerges larger than before: Why has this relatively minor disciple been transported to Britain, as Lucius of Edessa has also been?

The second noteworthy passage of the Georgian MS holds a part of the answer to the questions so crucial to my thesis, and it deserves to be quoted as true to Adolf Harnack's German translation as possible. In par. 16 we read:

I [Joseph], however, climbed up to holy Golgotha to the Lord's cross and collected in a headband and a large sheet the beloved blood that had flowed from his side; then I went home with fear and joy and told my story and all praised the Lord with me.²⁹

These lines connect this account specifically with one of the most inalienable qualities of the Holy Grail: that in it Joseph of Arimathea captured Jesus' blood dripping from his body as he hung from the cross. Indeed, this text may well be the Ur-source of this attribute of the Holy Grail of the romances. Robert de Boron, writing four or more centuries after the Georgian MS and using Greek apocrypha as well in constructing his proto-history of the Holy Grail, describes the same scene. But he substitutes the Grail for the apocryphal shroud as recipient of the dripping blood of Jesus, and the collecting occurs a bit later, during the cleansing of the body.³⁰ There can be little doubt that Robert received the defining details of his seminal creation of the Grail's history from these Byzantine apocrypha. By Robert's time virtually all of them had emerged in the West in Latin or even French translations. In addition, it is universally accepted that besides the Georgian "I, Joseph," Robert's Grail narrative was also built upon the *Acta Pilati* and the *Vindicta Salvatoris*. The latter provided Robert with the story of how Vespasian—not coincidentally, it must be agreed by now—was healed of his leprosy by Veronica's Jesus-image on cloth, then (having converted to Christianity) avenged Jesus' crucifixion by sacking Jerusalem in the year 70.³¹

The question may fairly be asked about why Robert did not write a romance of the Edessan shroud icon—whose literature was long known in the West and must have come to his attention—instead of adapting its legend and literature to the service of the Grail. One reply comes immediately to mind: he wrote in the years just before the Lateran Council of 1215, which defined transubstantiation. In the decades before 1215 this topic would have been the subject of much discussion in his clerical circles. Chrétien's host on a paten suggests a similar interest in this question. So Robert probably fastened upon the cup of the Last Supper as a vehicle for expressing his views on a topic then on the lips of many. The

burial wrap of Jesus, imaged or not, would not play as well in this arena. To this response may be added that the claimed discovery of the cup of the Last Supper in Caesaraea in 1101 had brought it to the attention of the West. To my knowledge, there existed no prior legend of the precious cup until Robert wrote, sometime between 1186 and 1211. The most prominent Jesus relics until then were the True Cross and the not-made-by-hands portrait of Jesus on cloth that resided in Edessa and, since 944, in Constantinople (see note 17). The arrival of a possibly authentic cup-relic in Troyes about 1205—sent with other spoils from Constantinople by its bishop Garnier de Trainel—came to the West without any prior legends.³² Rather, it was the existing legends of the burial-cloth icon that gave Robert his vehicle, as this essay has tried to demonstrate.

Why Joseph? III. Freculphus of Lisieux

So far we have Joseph apocryphally associated with the shroud icon but still in the East with Philip. The text that created and is the immediate root source of Joseph's fictitious arrival in the West is an ambiguous statement by Freculphus, ninth-century bishop of Lisieux (d. 853), which could—and did—give the false impression that St. Philip actually preached in Gaul (*Gallis*, below), from which he then sent missionaries to evangelize Britain.³³ Centuries before Robert de Boron, Freculphus knew of a non-canonical association of Joseph and Philip, very likely from the Lydda account in the Georgian MS, which alone, to my knowledge, had associated the two—but, properly, in the Middle East and not in France. Joseph's reputed presence in the West, then, is dependent upon his early apocryphal association with St. Philip, mistakenly thought to have preached Christianity in the West. According to Freculphus,

Philip . . . came from Bethsaida, as had Peter. . . . As ecclesiastical history relates, he preached Christ among the Gauls (*Gallis*). . . . Then he was stoned and crucified in Hierapolis, city of the province of Phrygia, and was buried and rests there along with his daughters.³⁴

Freculphus' words are ambiguous: his *Gallis* surely meant the Galatians of Turkey and not the Gauls of France. But his ambiguity opened the floodgates of pseudo-history by catapulting Joseph westward, as is shown below.

Why Joseph? IV. William of Malmesbury

Bede's King Lucius and Freculphus' ambiguity about Philip's supposed missionary work in the West—as we have seen, both fostered by

misunderstandings of Byzantine apocrypha—were also used about 1135 by William of Malmesbury in writing his small treatise *On the Antiquity of the Church of Glastonbury* (*De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*). William said here in his own original account (and in his earlier *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, c. 1125) that if St. Philip had preached in Gaul as Freculphus declared, he probably sent the missionaries into Britain. But, said William, this may only be pious opinion (see Scott 168; for the *Gesta*, I.19 see Hardy, 31ff.).

The books of both Bede and Freculphus were also available to subsequent redactors of William of Malmesbury. It is well known since J. A. Robinson's classic work on Glastonbury that in their efforts to enhance the stature of their abbey, the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century monastic editors of William used Bede's letter from "British" King Lucius and, conveniently misusing Freculphus, they crystallized Philip in France and had Philip send Joseph at the head of a missionary team to Glastonbury. Robinson and Carley (1985) have shown that crucial emendations were added to William's book, notably by two Glastonbury monks, Adam of Domerham in his *History of Glastonbury* sometime between 1247 and 1290 and John of Glastonbury, whose *Cronica* carried the history to 1342. It was only in Adam's first spurious embellishment of William's original book that Joseph of Arimathea was first brought—and only textually—to England. Scott (34-36 and 181, n. 21) and Lagorio (209) head up an array of scholars who accept that the appearance of the *Vulgate Estoire*, c. 1230, catalyzed Glastonbury's later decision to adopt Joseph as its proto-apostle. Lagorio has clearly presented on a single page (211) the entire process of Glastonbury's appropriation of Arthur and Joseph. William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* had assigned Glastonbury's first charter to King Ine (688-726). In his extant writings William never turned up any certain apostolic origin for the conversion of Britain—though he understood its significance (*Gesta* I.19)—and he never mentioned Joseph of Arimathea.

Even Geoffrey of Monmouth had the "honesty" to invent two otherwise unknown evangelists who have somehow become canonized in later texts about the conversion of England toward the end of the second century. It is a mark of the false and tendentious nature of Glastonbury's claims that William's redactors blissfully related "facts" that did not exist as facts in William's day or even as late as 1220 when someone manufactured the spurious Charter of St. Patrick, which even then omitted mention of Joseph (Scott 35). The monks carried the lie to its patent and palpable conclusion. They invented Geoffrey's King Aruiragus virtually out of thin air to make him the donor of twelve hides of Glastonbury land to Joseph and his followers on which to build the famous wattle and daub

church to the Virgin, alleged as Britain's and Europe's first—and apostolic—Christian church.³⁵ The whole scenario is a case of folklore in the form of written apocrypha created spontaneously and turned to political use.

The Holy Grail

Whatever the Holy Grail was thought to be—a dish holding a Mass wafer (Body of Christ), a cup of the transubstantiated blood of the Last Supper, or a cup which contained Jesus' actual blood from Golgotha—the Grail was linked to Joseph of Arimathea in its earliest thirteenth-century legends. These legends can only have derived from the apocrypha of the Greek East—for, as is well known, the only object in Joseph's NT biography is the shroud of Good Friday bought by him to wrap Jesus' body when it was placed in Joseph's family tomb. In addition, Joseph was transported to the West, if only by the unfortunate confusion wrought by Freculphus' *Philippus praedicavit Gallis*, of which we have seen the consequences. The Georgian "I, Joseph," which first announced Joseph's non-canonical association with Philip, also placed Joseph at the foot of the cross gathering Jesus' blood in the NT shroud. Now the error-propelled presence of Joseph in the West and his new association there with the Grail suggests that Joseph's Grail has somehow gotten confused with his NT shroud. Joseph and the shroud of Jesus disappear from the Gospels after the Resurrection. But the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, variously dated between the second and sixth centuries, brought Joseph onto center stage to become the protagonist in Robert de Boron's *Joseph*. In the same way, that eighth-century Georgian text with its shroud containing Jesus' body and blood gave us one of the Grail's paramount attributes.

Like the elusive name of King Lucius in Britain, so too the Holy Grail itself has eluded definition. Moreover, the Byzantine texts documenting the Holy Face icon in Edessa (from 944 to 1203 in Constantinople) are similarly confused about *its* precise identity—whether a cloth icon of Jesus' bloodstained face in a frame or a larger but folded cloth with an iconic life-sized image of the entire body of the crucified Jesus. I have described in detail elsewhere (Scavone 1999) that the rituals and displays of this relic, both in Edessa and in the capital, were rare, highly secretive, deliberately deceptive, and designed to inspire awe in the faithful. Confusion in the East about this icon came to the West as rumor and may be reflected in the confusion among medieval Grail authors about just what the Grail was. Nevertheless, most medieval writers of the Grail's history seem to agree about the *essential properties* of the Christian Holy Grail, and these properties reflect the influence of the texts about the shroud icon of Edessa and Constantinople. Helinand's etymology of the

word "Grail" is that it derives from Latin *gradalis*, "gradual," "in stages."³⁶ The Grail's secret was that in it the perfect knight saw the infant Jesus change (gradually or in stages?) into the crucified Jesus. The rituals of the Edessa cloth icon featured its mysterious display, first as the child Jesus and finally, by gradual stages throughout the day, as the crucified Jesus.³⁷ The numerous connections surveyed in the present study point to the Edessa/Constantinople shroud icon as the object by which the Holy Grail was defined in the mainstream Grail romances.

In addressing a series of ancient confusions, this paper has offered a set of solutions that would seem to have solved the problem of the identity of "British King Lucius" and, perhaps, provided a textual documentation of the origins of the Holy Grail itself. Although the connections are in many cases circumstantial, they provide a plausible explanation for a literary mystery that would otherwise almost certainly remain inexplicable forever.

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Notes

¹ In these murals one celebrant can be seen about to cut the naked child Jesus with a miniature lance (*lonche*). See Ștefănescu, especially illus. LV-LVI and LXVII-LXX. See Taft ("Melismos") 551. See also M. Garidis. Examples of these murals still extant in the twentieth century were to be found at Studenica (modern-day Serbia), Donja Kamenica (now western Bulgaria), Ljuboten and Matejić (northern Macedonia), Mt. Athos/Chilandari (on the Acte peninsula, southeast of Thessaloniki, Greece), and Kafiona (east of Kalamata in the Peloponnese).

² See Walter 205-19 and pl. 55-56; Belting (*Image*) 124-26. Germanos I had intimated his awareness of the *Melismos* in the eighth century; see Migne (*Traditio*) col. 387-91. Taft ("Bridegroom" 87-91) does not doubt the presence and influence of the shroud icon in Byzantine liturgical practice from the tenth century onward. As indicated here, evidence is largely iconographic. Taft adds, "Emotionally laden references to Jesus' burial, to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea wrapping Jesus' body in the sindon" are placed in Constantinople by Germanos II, whose regnal years (1222-40) coincide with the time of Western rule in the capital (83).

³ For Galahad's vision, see Matarasso 275-76; Lacy (*Lancelot-Grail*) 4: 82-87; Sommer 6: 197; and Anitchkof 182-84. For Gawain's vision, see Bryant (in English) 79, or Nitze (*Le Haut Livre*) 1:119, vss. 2438-2509. For Arthur's experience, Bryant 26 = Nitze 1: 35-36, vss. 283-322. For the *Estoire*, see Sommer 1: 40; also Lacy (*Lancelot-Grail*) 1: 28 (*Estoire*, ch. 7:193-94). See Walter 206 on the twelfth-century innovations in the *melismos* liturgy. See also Lot-Borodine 169-72 and R. S. Loomis (*The Grail*) 245-46.

⁴ Scavone ("Joseph") 1-5 and notes to those pages. Also see note 29 in that study. For the argument that this icon was the original shroud of Jesus known in 958, see Mazzucchi.

⁵ Scavone ("Joseph") 10 and n. 24. In addition, the Byzantine flavor of the Grail procession is evidenced by the presence of the lance (from the Byzantine Mass) and by the "noble tunic of precious cloth from Constantinople" worn by the priest in the *First Continuation* (9 and n. 24). Nitze ("The Bleeding Lance" 306 and *passim*) similarly thinks the Grail procession in Chrétien resonates with the Great Entrance of the Byzantine liturgy. Scavone ("Joseph") indicates other episodes and elements in Grail

literature that have clearly drawn from the same spring, and it is, in all ways, a proper introduction to the present article.

⁶ Winterbottom, vol. 7. Also Williams 22, n. 2: *Quae, licet ab incolis tepide suscepta sunt*. ("These [Christian] precepts had a lukewarm reception from the inhabitants.") This is all Gildas says respecting the evangelization of Britain.

⁷ For example, under "Lucius" in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Lacy, ed.), Geoffrey Ashe says nothing about the Lucius of the present study but has been exercised to identify Roman Emperor Lucius Hiberus:

Geoffrey [of Monmouth] hesitates over his [Lucius'] status. He introduces him as Procurator of the Republic. . . . Later . . . emperor. . . . Where he found Lucius is not so clear. No such emperor ever existed.

The entry suggests further that Geoffrey could have garbled Sigebert of Gembloux's "Lucerius" (error for Roman Emperor Glycerius) into "Lucius." See also Parry 85. For Lucius Hiberus, see Griscom 459-96 (= *HRB*, IX.xv-XI.i).

⁸ Jackson 2; Bromwich 14 and n. 18.

⁹ Littleton and Malcor. See also Malcor ("Lucius" Part 2.). Littleton and co-author Malcor have urged that the legends brought across a continent to Britain about 175 by Iazygian horsemen from southern Russia were the Ur-sources for the Holy Grail and for most other specifics of the Celtic and French Arthurian literature and legend. Over time, their stories supposedly overwhelmed and were superimposed upon the already rich native Welsh-Irish traditions and legends of local heroes. So impressed were these proto-Sarmatians by the charisma of Artorius, their appointed commander, that, in the second century, they incorporated his name into their native legends or initiated and transmitted legends about him that have come down to the present day. It must be admitted that it is difficult to accept that King Arthur is the result—700 years after Artorius—of the localized fame of a little-known Roman unit commander. For Littleton and Malcor, not only did L. Artorius Castus leave his name in written popular Alan tales, but he figured in virtually every major event in British military history in his time, though no ancient or medieval historian—such as Dio Cassius, Herodian, or Geoffrey of Monmouth—knew of him. These sources identify instead a number of other leaders (e.g., Marcellus,

Priscus, and Pertinax) who drive that history. One is reminded of Lizette Fisher's admonition: "So many good theories have snapped when stretched to cover too many points" (ix). According to Hicklin, Malcor may have forced her scant lapidary evidence beyond its historical usefulness. See also note 15 below.

¹⁰ Barber 37-38; Reno (*The Historic King Arthur*) 329-30. See also Reno's *Historic Figures*:

This leads back to the original flaw: Only one name, Lucius Artorius Castus, appears in the histories, and that was three hundred years before the great king's time, showing that "Arthur" was an uncommon—not common—name. Richard Barber postulates several different Arthurs during the mid-500s, but instead of ascribing them to Artorius Castus, he convincingly refutes the association by writing that a link between Lucius Artorius Castus and the Welsh Arthur would be extremely tenuous. He continues by writing that a bridge of tradition from a second-century Roman officer to the Welsh Arthur would be a "daring feat of imagination, but not admissible evidence."

Salway, 160-61 and 384-85, has not named Castus in his updated edition. For Malcor's positions, see the Arthurnet Archives, various discussions under "Malcor." (67)

¹¹ Collingwood, et al., 270. Others in general agreement are Burdach, Henry and Renée Kahane, Wesselofsky, and Scott (2), who takes quite for granted that there was no King Lucius in Britain. See also Alan Smith's concluding "Note A, The Real King Lucius?" where he asks questions to which answers are here proffered.

¹² Colgrave et al., 1: 4. Also Sherley-Price et al., 49 and 325, and King 1: 28-31. On the titles and honorifics assumed by the Roman emperors, see Scarre, who has meticulously listed them.

¹³ Morris 23 and 64: *HB* ch. 22. This sense of *Eucharisto* was first suggested to me by William Hicklin (personal communication), and I was able to confirm it from the text of Eusebius. For Evaristus as a Greek, but with a Jewish father, see L. R. Loomis 9. Evaristus appears as the pope in J. A. Giles, ed., *Six Old English Chronicles* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848).

¹⁴ *Epistolas suas Eleutherio pape direxit, petens ut ab eo christianitatem reciperet. Serenauerunt enim mentem eius miracula que tyrones Christi per diuersas nationes faciebant. Vnde in amorem uere fidei anhelans. Pie petitionis effectum consecutus est. Siquidem beatus pontifex comperta eius deuotione duos religiosos doctores Faganum & Duuianum misit ad illum; qui uerbum dei incarnatum predicantes abluerunt ipsum baptisate sacro & ad christum conuerterunt [IV.19]. . . . Ab hac uita migravit. & in ecclesia prime sedis honorifice sepultus est anno ab incarnatione domini. C.LVI. Caruerat ipse sobole que sibi succederet. Unde defuncto illo & discidium inter britones ortum fuit & romana potestas infirmata [V.1-2]. . . . Cumque id rome nunciatum fuisset legauerunt senatusores Seuerum senatorem. duasque legiones cum illo. ut patriam romane potestati restituerent. Qui ut appulsus fuit. prelium commisit cum britonibus [V.2].* Griscorn 328-32. English translation is in Dunn 85-89.

¹⁵ See Duchesne cii. The Abbé Louis Duchesne, editor of the *LP*, thought Lucius and the mysterious insert belonged somehow in the history or pseudo-history of England. For an English translation, see L. R. Loomis xi-xx; for Eleutherus, 16-17. For Eleutherus' fictive response to a British King Lucius, see Migne, *S.P.N. Ignatii*, Epistola II (55) cols. 1143-44. For Dio, see Cary.

¹⁶ Riddy 317-31 has a discussion of the question of Gildas as Bede's source.

¹⁷ King 1: 4-5. Besides the time of the Crusades, we know of at least one other major moment when Byzantine apocrypha and other texts, religious and otherwise, came westward. This was the time of the advance of Islam into Byzantine lands and, in fine, the arrival in Canterbury of Theodore of Tarsus (602-90) fleeing westward with his Greek library. It has further been generally accepted that Gregory, Bishop of Tours (538-94), in his *Decem libris historiarum* (*History of the Franks*) 1.21 and 1.24 was familiar with the *Gospel of Nicodemus*: Gregory tells of the imprisonment and liberation of Joseph of Arimathea "as the *Acts of Pilate*, sent to Emperor Tiberius, report" and says they "are still preserved written down today" (*ut Gesta Pilati ad Tiberium imperatorem missa referunt . . . apud nos hodie retenentur scripta*). See Izydorczyk 45. I may conjecture that since Bede's mentor Albinus had studied under Archbishop of Canterbury Theodore of Tarsus, he would have been conversant with Theodore's library. Lapidge, "The Career of Theodore" (*Archbishop*

Theodore 6-10) notices that Theodore had for a time lived among the Syriac scholars of Edessa. See Laistner, 150ff. and 170; also Bede, *HE* IV.2. This library almost certainly contained the texts about the Abgar saga and the reputed not-made-by-human-hands Christ icon of Edessa, a story that exists in scores of versions in Byzantine and Syriac literature and an icon that was to be at the center of the iconodule position in the eighth-century ideological war over Byzantine Christ-iconography. On the notoriety of this icon and its legends, see the papers in Kessler and Wolf. The image "not made by hands" found its way, as an interpolation, into the *First Continuation* of Chrétien's *Perceval* (thirteenth century). See R. S. Loomis (*The Grail*) 225ff.

¹⁸ Harnack ("Der Brief") 909-16, esp. 911. Rufinus (345-411) translated Clement's no longer extant *Hypotyposes* into Latin under the title *Dispositiones*. It, too, is lost. It may have been he who rendered Clement's Greek as *Britium Edessenorum*.

¹⁹ See *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* and *Life of Severus* 18, in Birley 201. (These lives in the *Historia Augusta* were written by six biographers of the late third-early fourth centuries.) Also Dio (c. 150-235 CE) 75: 1-2 on Septimius Severus' campaign of 195 (in Cary 9: 195-210). For Severus in Geoffrey, see Griscom 331ff. (= *HRB* V.ii). English translations in Dunn. Herodian (c. 165-250 CE), III.9.2, puts Abgar on campaign at the side of Severus in 197-98. See Dio (LXXX.16.2ff.) for Lucius Abgar's state visit to Rome. Writing about the triumphant arrival in Rome of a favored athlete, Dio said "[he] was brought to Rome, accompanied by an immense escort, larger than Abgarus had had in the reign of Severus or Tiridates [had] in that of Nero."

²⁰ Segal (*Edessa*) 14 and 24. His note 1 points out that Abgar VIII (177-212) has been wrongly called Abgar IX, as Bellinger and Welles (150) prove. Abgar IX (212-14) did, however, take the name Severus; this last king of Edessa had a reign short and unglorious. This is a small point in support of my major thesis that Edessan or generally Byzantine elements do run through the parallelism between the Edessa icon and the Grail first suggested in Scavone ("Joseph").

²¹ On Luce-Carcelois, see Lacy (*Lancelot-Grail*) 1: 154 (*Estoire*, ch. 37.269) and 159 (*Estoire*, ch. 40.293). Since Geoffrey of Monmouth asserted (V.1) that King Lucius had no heirs, he was probably not a direct source used by the writer of the *Estoire* or by John of Glastonbury for these parallels. However, Geoffrey did introduce Severus immediately

after relating the death of King Lucius (V.2). In a curious sidelight, Alan Smith's short article mentions that, in a Welsh *History of the [Dover] Castle*, William Darrell (d. 1721) wrote, "This pious prince [our Lucius] . . . having no issue, appointed at his death . . . the Roman Emperor Severus his successor" (33). This added confusion is no longer completely unexpected. Smith was quite conversant in the matter of Edessa, but doubted that it could ever be proved. We have corresponded recently, and he has been favorably impressed by the evidence presented here. The phenomena articulated by Imbs seem further to be operative in the following curious cases, though they are not intended here as necessary to my argument. Abgar VIII of Britium/Edessa waged war against and then went to the aid of an emperor Lucius, this being clearly and historically Lucius Septimius Severus. Then Abgar VIII adopted the name Lucius in actual events, as confirmed by the unimpeachable evidence of his coins (Bellinger and Welles, in note 20 above). It should be noted that Septimius Severus was active chiefly in the two frontiers of the Roman Empire: Britain and Mesopotamia, wherein lay Edessa/Britium. Always bearing in mind the confusion between Britain and Britium/Edessa in the present context, we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth the fictitious and undatable struggle of Arthur against Roman Emperor Lucius Hiberus (Lucius Septimius Severus?), who enlisted the help of eastern kings of Libya, Bithynia, and Syria against Arthur—odd for a war in Rome's westernmost province. Geoffrey's account of these allies of an invented Roman emperor resonate with the historical campaigns of Septimius Severus against the Parthians—with Abgar VIII, an oriental, at his side—in 197-98, but transferred by Geoffrey to Britain. Late in his reign Septimius also, in fact, waged campaigns in Britain from about 205 to 211. Lucius Septimius Severus was thus a figure well known in Roman-British history. Max Cary (706-11) notes that Septimius, born in Lepcis Magna, and thus *Africanus* and not literally *Hiberus* (Spanish), with a Syrian wife, favored eastern provincials in his service and granted the franchise to many regions in the eastern Mediterranean (see note 23 below).

²² On the possible correspondence, see Harnack ("Der Brief") 911. The key article for the Roman names of Abgar is Babelon (209-96) discussed in detail in Bellinger and Welles 149-51. The evidence for Abgar VIII consists of bronze coins struck with Commodus, Septimius Severus, and Caracalla (Babelon 247-58, pls. IV, 2-14, and V, 1-7). They date from 177-211 and testify to Abgar VIII's close relations with Rome. So too, Abgar VIII as a Christian is supported by the information in Edessa's archives, or *Chronicle* (see Hallier).

²³ For the *Doctrine of Addai*, see Howard. “Eleutheropolis” in truth had reference to “freedom” or “independence” rather than to any personal name. In 200 CE Septimius Severus renamed Beth-Gubrin and endowed its residents with the *ius italicum*, recreating it as the city of free men, Eleutheropolis. Still, given a context replete with other linkages, the fourth-century writer’s naming of this city gives it the added significance proposed here—and it suggests the time of Lucius Septimius Severus and of Lucius Abgar VIII.

²⁴ Howard 3 and 11. See also Lake. It may be worth noting that Rita Lejeune (285-88) has made much of the phrases *l’an an sert* and *l’an an servoit*, used nine times by Chrétien. Its frequent repetition ensures its importance as a *phrase-clef* and *leit-motiv*. She notes, however, that each time that expression is used, it does not fit very well (*la phrase paraît, à chaque fois, terriblement maladroite, grinçante dans sa syntaxe, discordante dans sa musique.*) Finally, she explains it as providing the name of the Grail-bearer: Ana or Anu, a *mater deorum Hibernensium* (Irish) who nourishes the gods. She concludes that Perceval was supposed to ask whom Anan served from her vessel. With this in mind, we may consider that in the Edessan legend the messenger who bore the Jesus image that healed crippled King Abgar was named Hanan (in Greek Ananias). I wish to suggest with caution that the legend of the crippled Abgar healed by the icon borne by Hanan/Ananias (of which Chrétien thus would have been aware) conjured up in Chrétien’s fertile mind the notion of Ana as the most suitable bearer of her curative Grail. This explanation is fortified by the many other parallels between the Grail and the Edessan icon.

²⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, eds., “Acts of the Holy Apostle Thaddaeus, One of the Twelve” 8: 558, esp. n. 4. Greek in Dobschütz 82*. (The priceless 1100-page single volume of Dobschütz was paginated as three volumes in one: 1-294, followed by 1*-335* and 1**-355**.)

²⁶ Scavone (“Review”) and see especially Gunther.

²⁷ *Chronicle of Edessa*, in Hallier, vol. IX, pt. I, 91. See his discussion 48-53 and 84-91. Entries I and IX of the *Chronicle* bear on the issue of when Christianity appeared in Edessa. The account of the great flood of 201 in Edessa includes, unobtrusively, among the buildings destroyed “the sanctuary of the Christian church.” Also on the question of Christianity’s establishment in Edessa, see Segal (*Edessa*) and his bibliography. Segal (“When Did Christianity Come to Edessa?”) has urged again more

recently that Christianity arrived twice, once in the time of Abgar V (13-55 CE) and again in the late second century. In two studies ("Addai" and "Facts"), Drijvers put the icon in Edessa in the mid-third century, more than a century prior to the *Doctrine of Addai*.

Lipsius, vol. II, pt. 2, 159-61 and notes, provides an interesting list of texts stating the place of death and burial of the apostle Thaddaeus. All of them post-date the above citation of Clement:

a. Pseudo-Dorotheos B (fourth century): "Judas, son of James . . . died in Edessa . . . and is buried there."

b. Pseudo-Hippolytos (third-century pope): "Judas [son] of James . . . lies in the city of Edessa."

c. An example of the Beirut version is given in Pseudo-Dorotheos A: "Judas, called Thaddaeus [son] of James . . . died in Beirut [= Berytos] and is buried there with honor." This, however, also resonates closely with the sense of Clement's *Hypotyposes*, where Thaddaeus was also *buried with honor in Britio Edessenorum*, the royal citadel (*birta*) of Edessa. Thaddaeus is thus early on associated only with Edessa/Britium, and one suspects that "Beirut/Berytos" is likely a misunderstanding of "Britium," as was Britain.

d. A Latin *lateralculus apostolorum* (cod. Paris. Lat. 9562) provides the clue to the confusion of Beirut and Britium. It places *Thaddaeus et Judas in Beryto Edessenorum*.

²⁸ Wilson (*Turin Shroud*). The present paper does not offer comment on the Turin Shroud.

²⁹ See Kluge, Harnack ("Ein in georgischer Sprache"), and Van Esbroeck. See also the supportive comments of Wesselofsky and Scavone ("Joseph"). Recently, Deborah Crawford has argued rightly that the evolution of the role of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain derives solely from Western sources. The present study has discovered sources in Eastern apocrypha beyond the chronological boundaries of Western Arthurian romancers that present a possible answer to the frequent question: "Why Joseph?" Crawford has also posed the question as follows: "The proponents of a literary evolution have never provided an adequate solution for the central puzzle: 'why anyone's imagination should have brought Joseph—a most unlikely person—to Britain at all'" (1). Her

focus on the West may have prevented her from appreciating the positive contributions to the story of Joseph to be found in the Eastern texts presented here and in my earlier study. For example, in her discussion of the Georgian “I, Joseph” (see above: “Why Joseph? II. The Georgian ‘I, Joseph’”) she did not mention from that text the earliest known account of Joseph capturing, in the burial shroud, Jesus’ dripping blood while he hung on the cross. It is perhaps the most important and salient datum to be gleaned from the Eastern apocrypha bearing on the history of the Grail and the role of Joseph. Robert de Boron, a contemporary of Chrétien who described the same event, made Joseph catch the blood in the Grail (note 30 below). Crawford’s position took issue with the literary researches of Bruce, Ciggaar, Lagorio, Loomis, Nitze, Nutt, O’Gorman and, indirectly, of Burdach, Harnack, the Kahanes, Roach, and Wesselofsky, seminal scholars who accept Robert’s Ur-contribution to the legend of the Holy Grail. She suggested that there might be significant sources or variants “out there” beyond what is found in Robert’s *Joseph* that none of these scholars has considered. However, the variants that she has proffered do not seem to be significant or cogent; they can be traced only as far as the twelfth century, and they emphatically do not provide an answer to “Why Joseph?”

O’Gorman (“Prose Version” 449-50) is worth quoting, and his words are representative of mainstream scholarship about Robert de Boron:

[Robert’s work] is crucial in the development of legends surrounding the Holy Grail, as well as fundamental to an understanding of the evolution of Arthurian prose romance in the 13th century. . . . We have in Robert’s romance the first work which brings the mysterious Grail into a clear and unmistakable relationship with the events of the Last Supper. . . . His *Joseph* is . . . one of the oldest and also one of the least ambiguous documents on which any solution of the problems associated with the early stages of Grail tradition must be based.

The issue is not simple, and the early (i.e., pre-ninth century) Greek, Syriac, Georgian, or Armenian texts about Joseph, all construed under the rubric of “apocrypha,” are not easily accessible. But they exist, and it is important that they be allowed to play into Joseph’s post-canonical biography. It is very important for a researcher to consult them for traditional, literary, and historical leads that might bear crucially upon one’s researches. I will mention but one example. Crawford’s assertion (“St. Joseph” 9, citing Carley) that Glastonbury’s two vials or cruets

cannot be dated before the fourteenth century clearly needs a corrective. In fact, a well-known legend about a crucifix that bled into two cruets was associated with Beirut and was recited in 787 at the second Council of Nicaea; the story subsequently reached the West and played into the legend of Lucca's *volto santo* icon, whose legend was known to Arthurian writers (see note 31 below). Finally, Crawford's insistence that the legend of Joseph in Britain cannot be shown to derive from Byzantium has long been denied by the best German scholarship of a century ago—that of Harnack and Zahn—and later that of others, such as Collingwood. They were aware already of Bede's erroneous assumption that Britium-Edessa meant Britain (above). Edessa's claim to have the burial shroud of Jesus brought Joseph—known only for his Good Friday shroud—to the orbit of Edessa/Britium (Scavone "Joseph"). It was precisely this point that set in motion the literary travels of Joseph of Arimathea to Britain and answers the question "Why Joseph?"

³⁰ For Robert's story of the Grail being used to collect Jesus' dripping blood, see Nitze (*Robert de Boron*) 20, vv. 552-72; see O'Gorman's *Robert de Boron* 77 and 79 for the prose version, with notes on 417; translation in Rogers 10. I think it must be acknowledged that the several variations on this theme, viz., the blood captured while Jesus hung on the cross or during the deposition or during the cleansing of the body in the tomb, all seem clearly to derive from this same Georgian story line, the earliest known of all such accounts. In this case, to studiously categorize all the variants—some born simply of poetic license and none having any material consequence—as folkloric subsets would not be helpful, but rather something of a trivial pursuit. For the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, see especially the studies by Alvin Ford and also Roberts and Donaldson 8: 472-76.

³¹ D. D. R. Owen has questioned Robert's primacy in creating the origin of the Holy Grail. Unfortunately, he drew one serious misinterpretation from his perceptive research. Having compared the 226 interpolated lines (see R. S. Loomis, *The Grail* 225-27) about Joseph of Arimathea in the *First Continuation* with the account of Joseph in Robert, Owen wrongly concluded that it was not Robert but rather the interpolator who created the Holy (Christian) Grail. However, his own chronological estimation does not prove that the interpolator antedated Robert, and their verbal and thematic similarities rather prove Robert's priority. When we know the rather esoteric ancient sources certainly used by Robert (Scavone "Joseph") and his creativity in weaving them into his Grail history, neither his research nor his creativity can be trivialized. Robert knew the essential

Georgian source of Joseph collecting Jesus' blood as it dripped from his body on Golgotha. His account follows the Georgian so closely as to permit no doubt. For Owen the interpolator's association of the Grail with the events of the Passion was "inspired perhaps by some legend he knew of the transference of the Precious Blood to the west, as well as by his own familiarity with the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and an account of the history of the Volto Santo of Lucca" (40; see also note 29 above). Owen's "some legend" is at best a weak bit of guesswork, and it cannot be the basis of a cogent hypothesis.

Finally, Mary Giffin, remembering that Robert was a Burgundian, has argued convincingly that Robert's *vaus d'Avaron* was Geoffrey's invented *insula Avallonis*, but it was not Britain's Ynyswitrin—isle of Glastonbury. Rather, it referred to the peaks and vales of the Burgundian Avallon, about fifty miles northwest of Autun, where was located the leper shrine of St. Lazare since at least 1078. That shrine had become a place of pilgrimage to which lepers came in great numbers in hopes of a miraculous cure. Since Geoffrey, writing about 1135, placed the great campaign between Arthur and Lucius Hiberus at Augustodunum (Autun) in *HRB* X.4ff. (Griscom, 474-84), he may well have had this Burgundian Avallon in mind as the venue of Arthur's healing (*HRB* XI.2; Griscom 501). When the author of the *First Continuation* wrote twice (vss. 1624-31 and 1827-29) of an oath which refers unmistakably to this place ("Mais par Saint Ladre d'Avalon" in MS *T* and "samir sante Lasarus von Davalun" in MS *D*), we may feel certain that the writer has referred to Robert's Burgundian Avallon and, *a fortiori*, that the later interpolator has also borrowed from Robert and not the other way around. Lawton xxix; Nitze ("Messire") 279; O'Gorman (*Robert de Boron*) ix and 449; and Roach ("Transformations") 164, accept fully the originality of Robert de Boron, as do most scholars. Nitze's view on Robert's use of "Avaron" ("Messire" 282-83) is cautiously balanced. Roach accepted that Robert may have known Chrétien's work but did not know the first two *Continuations*. In fact, Roach has written that the *First Continuation* departs from Chrétien in telling an entirely pagan story in which the Grail is "a sort of cauldron of plenty." By implication, then, the insertion of the Christian Joseph elements (MS *E*, vv. 17553-778 in Roach *Continuations* 2: 524-27; = MSS *L* and *A*, 480-89) must be a later interpolation. Yet by Owen's own reasoning, I dare to ask: Can Robert himself have been the interpolator who Christianized the Grail of Chrétien and the author of the 226 lines of Grail history inserted in the *First Continuation*? It is a thesis perhaps worth pursuing. As is well known, Geoffrey's Avalon had never been equated with Glastonbury. The *Perlesvaus*, which may be the first narrative to do so, postdated Robert's *Joseph* (Nitze *Le Haut Livre* 2:

121). It only became feasible—and necessary—to identify Glastonbury with Avalon after the supposed discovery of Arthur's grave in 1191 (Scott 181, n. 21). Nitze ("Messire" 281) also attests to the Burgundian traits in Robert's language. Therefore, his allusions to *vaus d'Avaron* most likely carried intentional Burgundian resonances for his patron, his family, and his Burgundian audience, as Giffin has—rightly, I think—argued, but yet resonated with the British Grail setting begun by Chrétien's poem. See the excellent treatment of Avalon by Geoffrey Ashe in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* and, especially, that of Faral (2: 160-75 and 425-31).

³² On the vessel of the Last Supper in Troyes, see Nioré, 219-20. Several Western accounts of Edessa's legends were available to Robert. These include an iconodule sermon by Pope Stephen III in 769, an account by Ordericus Vitalis (c. 1141), and possibly the fuller account by Gervase of Tilbury about 1211, which even describes the Edessan display of the icon in stages. On the place of the transubstantiation issue in the Grail account of Robert, see Lizette Fisher's excellent monograph.

³³ Freculphus Lexoviensis (Lisieux) Episcopus, *Chronicon*, vol. II, bk. ii, ch. 4, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 106, cols. 917ff., esp. col. 1148. He wrote a chronicle from Genesis to Gregory I and the Lombards, using Josephus, Eusebius, Orosius, Bede, and many others. He seems to have considered the two Philips of the Book of Acts as the same person. It is possible to reach that conclusion from the New Testament. Lockyer noted (277) that Philip the apostle essentially disappeared after Pentecost, while Philip the deacon has a role only after Pentecost. J. A. Robinson (35) notes that Isidore of Seville (d. 638) was Freculphus' source for this passage.

³⁴ In Acts, Philip the deacon preached along the Palestinian coast and in Samaria and settled in Caesarea. He may at some time have been bishop of Tralles in Lydia and have preached in Phrygia, neighboring on Galatia, all located in modern Turkey. But no Philip can be found in the West in ancient Biblical or apocryphal sources.

³⁵ Robinson (36) thinks Joseph first "became" a British evangelist in a note added to William's *De Antiquitate (DA)* about 1247 in the margin of the Trinity College Cambridge MS R, 5.33. Carley (*The Chronicle*, li) apprises us that in the British Library copy the marginal note has been added to the text itself:

Since this latter manuscript almost certainly belonged to Adam of Domerham . . . the note must have been written before the 1290s [when Adam died]. . . . I would . . . perhaps even very tentatively attribute it to Adam of Domerham himself. . . . The first official recognition of Joseph at Glastonbury is not recorded until John [of Glastonbury] wrote his *Cronica* in the early 1340s.

Scott (34-39) agrees with Carley's assessment and provides a study of the MS tradition of William's *DA*.

Geoffrey of Monmouth (IV.12-17) had already recreated Aruiragus as a foil to Roman Emperor Claudius, but his innovation was political only and was not connected to British church history. Aruiragus reappears only in the later Glastonbury redactions of the *DA* (beginning c. 1247), but, oddly, not yet in Adam of Domerham's par. 69 (Scott 141), which names the pagan kings who donated lands to Glastonbury. Though fictitious in Britain, Aruiragus' role "grew" with time and need. Elsewhere I hope to demonstrate his ties to Edessa.

³⁶ See Richard O'Gorman's entry "Grail" in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Lacy, ed., 1986). See also Rejane Molina's study of Helinand.

³⁷ Scavone "Joseph" and notes 1-5 above.

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